

The

# Ellul Studies

Forum

A Forum for Theology in a Technological Civilization

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## In This Issue: Ellul On Communications Technology

### From the Editor

As promised, this issue is devoted to Ellul's critique of our mass media society. My thanks to our guest editor, Clifford Christians, for putting this issue together. I will let Cliff brief you on the contents.

Darrell J. Fasching, Editor

### About This Issue

by Clifford Christians, Guest Editor

English-speaking students of mass communications first noticed Ellul when *Propagandes* was translated in 1965. Propaganda studies following World War II had centered on overt, political manipulation with Hitler's Goebbels the archetypal case. Ellul helped us come to grips with the subtle, covert and devastating ways in which media technologies reorient our values around efficiency. Communication scholars interested in theology have welcomed Ellul's other books and essays in this area.

Ellul's contributions to symbolic theory are the least well known and they are outlined in this issue by J. Wesley Baker. Darrell Fasching examines one of Ellul's most disturbing claims -- that the visual media short-circuit our critical capacities. I review Ellul's hard-hitting *Humiliation of the Word* in the light of recent theoretical work on the nature of communication systems. And, as typical with *The Ellul Studies Forum*, representative books covering the same territory are introduced as a way of encouraging dialogue with similar and contradictory viewpoints. Two recent dissertations applying Ellul to communications are introduced, in the hope that other dissertations on Ellul will be abstracted in future issues of the *Forum*.

Communications is not a discipline per se, but a region of common intellectual concerns where many disciplines cross. Given Ellul's own breadth and interdisciplinary interests, he has been fully at home when dealing with problems in communications. And because the mass media are such a dominant social institution today, those acquainted with Ellul from many disciplines have also followed closely his studies on communication technologies. They serve as a productive arena for examining Ellul's central ideas.

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# Bulletin Board

## Ethics After Auschwitz and Hiroshima

The first book of a two volume project on narrative ethics after Auschwitz and Hiroshima by Darrell Fasching has just been released by Fortress Press under the title *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (1992). The second book will be published next summer (1993) by SUNY Press under the title: *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* The following is taken from the prologue of the first book:

These two volumes are intended to be an experiment in theology of culture as an approach to comparative religious ethics. This first volume, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz*, from the perspective of a narrative ethic approach, attempts to restructure the Christian narrative tradition, in the light of Auschwitz, through a dialogue with that strand of post-Holocaust Jewish theology and ethics which draws upon the Jewish narrative tradition of *chutzpah*. This volume culminates in an ethic of personal and professional responsibility proposed as a strategy for constraining the human capacity for the demonic. This takes the form of an ethic of audacity (*chutzpah*) on behalf of the stranger.

In the next volume, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*, I continue the narrative ethics approach but extend the ethical focus of the discussion to encompass religion, technology and public policy in a cross-cultural perspective. There I suggest that the dominant myth or narrative of our modern global technological civilization is the Janus-faced myth of "Apocalypse or Utopia." This mythic narrative tends to render us ethically impotent, for, mesmerized by the power of technology, we become trapped in the manic-depressive rhythms of a sacral awe -- i.e., of fascination and dread. When we are caught up in the utopian euphoria created by the marvelous promises of technology we do not wish to change anything. And when, in our darker moments, we fear that this same technology is out of control and leading us to our own apocalyptic self-destruction, we feel overwhelmed and unable to do anything. The paradox is that the very strength of our literal utopian euphoria sends us careening toward some literal apocalyptic "final solution."

In the second volume I argue that the narrative theme of the demonic which dominated Auschwitz -- "killing in order to heal" -- has become globalized and incorporated into the Janus-faced technological myths which emerged out of Hiroshima. It is this mythic narrative which underlies and structures much of public policy in our nuclear age. Finally, in response, I endeavor to extend the Jewish-Christian dialogue of the first volume to include Buddhism, in order to suggest a cross-cultural coalition for an ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation in response to this technological globalization of the demonic. At the heart of my position in these two volumes is the conviction that the *kairos* of our time is one which calls forth the badly neglected ethic of "welcoming the stranger" which underlies the biblical tradition, and analogously "welcoming the outcast" which underlies the Buddhist tradition. It is this care for the stranger and the outcast, I shall argue, which provides the critical norm for an ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation.

It is in the second volume that I construct a theory of theology of culture as comparative religious ethics. However, the theory I develop there and the conclusions I arrive at, concerning a cross-cultural pluralistic ethic of human rights in response to Auschwitz and Hiroshima, would be impossible for me without having first come to

grips with Auschwitz as a singular event for Western religion, culture and ethics. Each book is written as an argument which is intended to stand on its own. At the same time, however, the full scope of what I am proposing can only be grasped by reading both. My immediate goal in this volume is to span the abyss between Jews and Christians in a suggested coalition against the unprecedented power of the demonic which has erupted in this century. My ultimate goal, in the next volume, is to expand this coalition so as to bridge not only the abyss between religions, East and West, but also between religious and secular ethics.

The total project, then, is about religion, ethics and public policy after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. It is about: (a) rethinking the meaning of civilization and public order in an emerging pluralistic world civilization as we approach the end of a millennium -- the year 2000 C.E.; (b) the need of a cross-cultural ethic in a world racked by ethical relativism and ideological conflict and; (c) the mythologies of the sacred and the secular in a technological civilization and the appropriate role for religion in the shaping of public values in a "secular" world.

The perspective from which these books are written is that of theology. However, it is not "Christian" theology although it is assuredly theology written by a Christian. It is not "confessional theology" but theology understood as an academic discipline within the humanities, whose purpose is the illumination of the human experience (individual and communal) of transcendence as self-transcendence. Needless to say, the same subject matter would be treated differently had this project been written by a Buddhist or some other more "secular" a-theist, or by a Hindu, Jew or Muslim rather than a Christian. And yet I intend it to be a theology which has something to say not only to Christians but also to Jews and Buddhists and others without being either a Jewish or Buddhist theology, etc. And I mean it to be a theology relevant to "secular" or humanistic a-theists as well. . . .

The first volume, I hope, suggests the possibility of a common coalition between Jews and Christians against any future eruptions of the demonic. In the next volume I attempt to extend this coalition, suggesting a cross-cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation through the synergy of the diverse narrative traditions (East and West, religious and secular) of hospitality, whose common theme is *welcoming the stranger*. Contrary to the usual critique of human rights (launched by narrative ethicists) as an attempt to impose a single universal "storyless" ethic on the whole human race, I argue that an ethic of human dignity and human rights requires just the opposite, namely, a pluralistic coalition of the narrative traditions of holy communities which only need to share one thing in common -- audacity in defense of the stranger.

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# Forum

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## Ellul on Communications Technology

### Ellul On The Need For Symbolism

by J. Wesley Baker  
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The more I have studied Ellul's writings, the more impressed I have become with the central role "communication" plays in his thought. Since my field of study is communication technologies, I initially was drawn to Ellul because of his insistence that the technological system (*la technique*) is dominating our era. There was, as well, an initial attraction because of the number of examples he draws from the media. But I have come to see that Ellul's concern with communication is at a far more important level: We can hope for the survival of what is human only if we engage in the creation of symbols which allow us to retain mastery in a technological environment. The purpose of this essay is to outline for Ellul scholars the central place our need to symbolize plays in Ellul's thought.

#### Ellul's Terminology

In his writings about communication, Ellul makes a point of insisting he does not take a specialist's viewpoint on the topic. Temple says that while this "outsider's" orientation contributes to an imprecision in his terminology, its strength is in providing a "common sense" approach.

Perhaps he is not always fair to leaders in the linguistic sciences, but (as in all his other books) he is neither a philosopher nor a literary critic. He writes as social commentator (and as an "ordinary" layman) observing the effects of changes in the role of language and also as a voice for common sense on behalf of all of us who feel that somehow the substance of language has been replaced by a trick with smoke and mirror images.<sup>1</sup>

It is this orientation which leads Ellul to argue: "Defining language by talking about codes, signifiers, the syntagma, semiotics, and semiology does not solve the problem" of language we face today. Always we must come back to simple facts, common sense, and commonplaces as our starting point.<sup>2</sup> He is concerned that an approach to language which is too "scientific" can rob it of its symbolic function.

Human language cannot be reduced strictly to a transmission of information. Communication/information theory is extremely impoverished for it reduces language to a reality, doubtless scientifically knowable, but one that excludes the principal aspect of the phenomenon. The symbolization of society is effected through language and, since the beginning, this process has considered the social relationship as not merely the immediate contact of human being to human being, but as a *mediated* relationship. This mediation creates a symbolic space for the obligatory interpretation of relationships. It provides a "windbreak" between man and man and causes brutality to be excluded so that coexistence becomes possible. Man cannot subsist on mere physical contact alone; he must symbolize it and situate it in a symbolic universe.<sup>3</sup>

The risk comes from our ability to "separate the code from the language, the information from the spoken words, or reduce information to bytes."<sup>4</sup> This technical approach to language leads to a reductionism which eliminates "from human language everything that goes beyond visual information, everything that is inaccessible to the code. The result would be not just an amputation, which is

the traditional reductionist method of all the sciences, but a surgical excision of language's very heart."<sup>5</sup> As a result, Ellul is opposed to any approach which limits language's "breadth of meaning, ambiguity, and variation in interpretation."<sup>6</sup> Most importantly for Ellul, the uncertainty inherent in our symbols provides us with individual freedom as we seek for truth and coherence.

#### Symbolization as a Basic Human Need

Ellul calls human symbol-making "one of the most basic functions of life."<sup>7</sup> He believes that our creation in the image of the God-who-speaks is at the base of our symbolizing and thus serves as an important part of what distinguishes us from the rest of creation.<sup>8</sup> It is, he says, "the specific characteristic of *Homo sapiens* . . ." But, besides defining man, this symbol-making function is also "the key to his success."<sup>9</sup> The "success" to which Ellul refers is humankind's ability to survive in its milieu or environment by gaining mastery over it through symbolization.<sup>10</sup>

Ellul links milieu and symbolization quite closely, noting that "symbolization is always effected in relation to the environment in which man lives, and as a function of the environment."<sup>11</sup> Ellul points out that it is only within "the environment [that] we have occasion to exercise one of the most basic functions of life, that is, symbolism. The environment gives us the chance to create symbols, and here are riches that spur us to development."<sup>12</sup> It is through this process of a sense-making ordering of the world that "man [is able] to engage himself in a certain mastery of nature."<sup>13</sup>

Mastery over our environment is made possible by this symbolic function as it provides humans "domination through distance and differentiation."<sup>14</sup> On the first point, domination through distance, Ellul argues that, "for there to be symbolization at all, the symbol-creator must be outside what he is symbolizing; there must be some distance between the symbolizer and the symbolized."<sup>15</sup> On the second, domination through differentiation, distinctions for Ellul result from our designation of names, because the "word is creator in that it names things, thus specifying them by differentiating them."<sup>16</sup> This gives us mastery over what we name as we attach importance, meaning, and place to it. "To name someone or something," he says, "is to show one's superiority over him or it."<sup>17</sup> As an example, Ellul refers to the Genesis account, where "Adam is confirmed as the head of creation when God brings all the animals to him so that he can give each one a name (Gen. 2:19)."<sup>18</sup> Thus, being comes through naming.

The Genesis passage that establishes creation on the basis of separation contains the germ of the most modern ideas about language: it tells us that difference both establishes the word and proceeds from it. The word bestows being on each reality, attributing truth to it; it gives dynamism to reality and prescribes a fixed trajectory for it. In this way the word disentangles confusion and nonbeing.<sup>19</sup>

Our name-making is driven by our need for coherence. The creative process allows us to order our environment through sym-

bols. "From the moment man proceeds to the denomination of things," Ellul writes, "he has made them enter his universe and they belong to a coherent ensemble. They belong to man by virtue of the name he has bestowed on them. He has not only put his mark on things, he has also made them [sic] exist."<sup>20</sup> This transformation comes as one symbolizes, making "his natural, objective reality into a special universe that he constitutes from within himself,"<sup>21</sup> and resulting in the "creation of a universe different from the one in which he is situated, but fully a part of his real milieu."<sup>22</sup>

The whole process of symbol-making is interpretive, making signs "enter into a coherent explanatory ensemble (even if only fictively explanatory) of which man stands as master."<sup>23</sup> Ellul says the coherence is gained as one selects which elements to feature or mask, in the same way as an artist interprets reality.

[Symbolization] is not like a photographic reproduction, which would serve no function: the painter makes choices of which characteristics of reality to retain, highlighting some and making them carriers of meaning, while others he marks for obliteration, pushing them into the shadows or making them disappear altogether. . . . There is a transformation into a new universe, which renders explicit and in terms of relationship, that which is implicit and without apparent relationship.<sup>24</sup>

Ellul places supreme importance on this interpretive process which provides structure for our world because it is through "the symbolic transformation of reality" that one "creates the possibility of acquiring a non-material grasp on reality, without which he would be completely unprovided for."<sup>25</sup>

Since the creation of symbols is rooted in the environment or milieu in which we find ourselves, problems arise during a time of transition. As we have moved into the environment of *la technique*, our use of symbols has become outdated. "[S]ince thinking is slow to move and verbal forms are always a step behind reality, the older environment serves as an ideological reference for those who have been plunged into the new one."<sup>26</sup> Importantly for Ellul, as we live during a time of transition, this tendency toward anachronistic symbolization leads to "enormous errors of judgment" which result in a failure to identify properly the challenge of *la technique*.<sup>27</sup>

### Self-Symbolization of *la technique*

As we attempt to make sense of our new technological environment, Ellul argues that *la technique* itself provides coherence through its self-symbolization.<sup>28</sup> Ellul contends that "technology is itself productive of symbols and becomes by itself its own symbol. . . . Technology is not only an environment, nor merely an ensemble of means and instruments; it is itself a symbolic universe. It furnishes itself with its own symbols."<sup>29</sup> As a result, "[n]ow it is technology which has taken over and which produces for man the coherent symbols that are attributable to the technological universe."<sup>30</sup>

Through the images produced by *la technique* some of our needs seem to be met. But Ellul argues that we have experienced "a complete inversion of the scale of needs."<sup>31</sup> As a result, the needs which are met are "artificial needs, which are unimportant, not in the least essential to man, but which become irrepressible, exigent, imperious, the only ones to be taken seriously in the long run . . . ."<sup>32</sup>

Images help us make up for the loss of the natural environment, a loss to which we have never quite reconciled ourselves. Without contact with the reality of the natural environment "we develop an extremely deep need for another reality." This need is met though "[t]he image is mirage [which] reconciles contradictions, makes absent nature present and real again . . . . Images counterbalance all the abstractions. And they restore to us at last a reality in which we can live: the reality of the world of images."<sup>33</sup> But this "world imagined by the media" is a "perfectly artificial world, recomposed

by the images and sounds of these media. Consequently," Ellul says, "there is no place for symbolization to occur."<sup>34</sup>

The end result is that we cannot gain mastery over our technological environment because the only experience we accept as "real" is itself the result of *la technique*'s self-symbolization. "[T]he images of a technical society only seem to be symbolizing by *reflecting* a reality that is itself only a reflection." Thus, instead of providing distance and differentiation, this self-symbolization "has the effect of integrating, adapting, and assimilating man to technique."<sup>35</sup> This integration is encouraged by our distraction from the reality of the system. "Images are essential if I am to avoid seeing the day-to-day reality I live in. They glitter continuously around me, allowing me to live in a sort of image-oriented fantasy."<sup>36</sup> Ellul draws a distinction between images as "a substitute reality" and the word, which "obliges me to consider reality from the point of view of truth." He writes, "Artificial images, passing themselves off for truth, obliterate and erase the reality of my life and my society."<sup>37</sup>

### The Need for New Symbols

Living in an environment of artificial images results in the elimination of meaning: "Language becomes, in effect, a system of signs which answer to certain archetypes, to certain uses and to certain habits, but the symbolic dimension of language is destroyed."<sup>38</sup> The "reality" of the poetic, mythic and metaphysical falls before the "reality" of the empirical. What can be "seen" by the soul is replaced by what can be seen with the eyes. The word becomes humiliated by the image. Symbol becomes sign. Language "becomes no more than a sort of organized noise," so that "a whole part of man's symbolic activity is rendered impossible. Among other things, he is capable neither of true consciousness nor of recognition."<sup>39</sup>

Part of the problem is that the Enlightenment's elimination of the metaphysical makes it difficult for people in modern society to create a "symbolic universe," that is, a superordinate sense-making of our environment which is based on the ultimate. Instead, we are limited to that which can be handled "scientifically." When it comes to language, the result has been the study of signs apart from meaning; ". . . the mentality of scientism has pounced upon language," Ellul complains, "and has involved us in reducing the word to the state of an object: a scientific object."<sup>40</sup> The tangible, what can be seen, becomes what is "real."

I cannot observe the signified, nor the relationship of the signifier with the signified. These are "philosophical" problems. On the contrary, I can observe the emission of a phrase, its circulation, deformation, and audition. I can even make nice diagrams of this process. This shows in the first place that this attitude follows the traditional "scientific" tendency: only what can be observed and analyzed by the classical scientific method is important (or even exists, in the extreme view). Since only the communication process involving the signifier can be thus analyzed, it is the only thing that matters to us. Everything else is a metaphysical argument that serves only to confuse the scientific relationship between subject and object.<sup>41</sup>

But in excluding meaning as beyond examination (and therefore unimportant) and in concentrating "exclusively on reality and the concrete," we lose the truth which is "to be read between the lines or heard in the silent moments of discourse." While the Image limits us to "[t]ruth verifiable by science," the word "continually casts doubt on this claim."<sup>42</sup>

The ultimate bankruptcy of the universe of images is out of sight for us in the environment of *la technique*. The system "presents itself as an environment so coherent and so unitary that it does not seem to have a point where man can insert anything else."<sup>43</sup> It "devalues all other mediations and man seems to have no need of symbolic mediation because he has technological mediation."<sup>44</sup> As a result,

"[n]ow it is technology which has taken over and which produces for man the coherent symbols that are attributable to the technological universe."<sup>45</sup>

The problem with this new reality is that its dependence on images produces the "tendency toward the disappearance of the symbolic function."<sup>46</sup> Given the unity of the system, "man seems to have no need of symbolic mediation because he has technological mediation. It even appears to man that technology is more efficacious and permits him a greater domination over what threatens him and a more certain protection against danger than does the symbolic process."<sup>47</sup> Our ability to create symbols has been sterilized by the ease with which we can "consume" the system's images. "Just as vaccines have progressively reduced the capacity of the organism to create spontaneously natural immunities, so in the same way, man no longer creates symbols because too many are offered him at too simple a level of consumption."<sup>48</sup> But these images "have not elaborated a significant and meaningful symbolic universe."<sup>49</sup> They have "ceased to assure us of permanence; ceased to call forth a deepened consciousness and thus cannot be creators of history."<sup>50</sup> They ultimately fail because they cannot meet our need for a "deep" coherence.

Provided with a technological mediation which is so efficient and so complete that it becomes embraced to the exclusion of all else, we have lost sight of the human need to create our own symbols if we are to survive and grow. "Man no longer feels specifically the need to launch himself into the adventure of initial symbolic creation precisely because he sees himself surrounded by those symbols that are actually produced by the technological system."<sup>51</sup> The easy access to the existing symbolic universe of *la technique* "sterilizes man's desire" to create one's own symbols.<sup>52</sup>

### Intervention into the Cycle

The vicious circle which is suggested by Ellul's analysis reveals to us the double importance of communication in his thinking: the seemingly complete mediation of *la technique* reduces our perceived need to create symbols, and without the creation of new symbols with which we can gain mastery over our new environment, no challenge to the technological mediation is possible. Thus Ellul seeks to provide an intervention into the cycle through his demonstration of the emptiness of the needs which are being met by *la technique* and the danger resulting from our loss of awareness of our need to symbolize. Only by breaking this vicious circle are adaptation and growth possible. "So long as the evolution of the symbolic universe remains possible, the normal evolution of society is possible without crisis and within humanely acceptable bounds."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, man's "only chance to subsist in his human specificity" is "to effect a symbolization of technology" toward human ends.<sup>54</sup> The "univocal" mediation by technology must be replaced with symbolization which is "plurivocal, equivocal, unstable in [its] applications, and also deeply rooted in a rich and creative unconsciousness."<sup>55</sup> Ellul believes that we must "work to create new values, to reach a consensus on a new meaning, to create new symbols." If this is done, then it is possible that technologies can be placed in the role of servant once again. But "if society is not successful, it surely will disintegrate. In other words," he says, "it is now a time for invention . . ."<sup>56</sup> It is to that invention of a new communication which adequately symbolizes the elements of *la technique* that Ellul calls us.

### NOTES

1. Katharine Temple, "Jacques Ellul: A Consistent Distinction," *Media Development* 35, no. 2 (1988): 21.
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3. *Ibid.*, 210.
4. Jacques Ellul, "Preconceived Ideas About Mediated Information," in *The Media Revolution in America and in Western Europe*, eds. Everett M. Rogers and Francis Balle (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), 103.
5. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 3.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 100.
8. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 50-51.
9. Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 1 (1978): 207.
10. Jacques Ellul, "An Aspect of the Role of Persuasion in a Technical Society," trans. Elena Radutsky and Charles Stern, *Et cetera* 36 (Summer 1979): 149.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Ellul, *What I Believe*, 100.
13. Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 208.
14. Ellul, "Role of Persuasion," 151.
15. *Ibid.*, 150.
16. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 53.
17. *Ibid.*, 52.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, 53.
20. Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 212.
21. *Ibid.*, 207.
22. *Ibid.*, 208.
23. *Ibid.*, 207; note deleted.
24. *Ibid.*, 207.
25. *Ibid.*, 208.
26. Ellul, *What I Believe*, 101.
27. *Ibid.*, 102.
28. Ellul, "Role of Persuasion," 151.
29. Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 217.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Jacques Ellul, "The Obstacles to Communication Arising from Propaganda Habits," *The Student World* 52 (1959): 405.
32. *Ibid.*, 404.
33. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 207.
34. Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 215.
35. Ellul, "Role of Persuasion," 151.
36. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 128.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 215.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 165.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, 182.
43. Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 217.
44. *Ibid.*, 216.
45. *Ibid.*, 217.
46. *Ibid.*, 214.
47. *Ibid.*, 216.
48. *Ibid.*, 217.
49. *Ibid.*, 214.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 217.
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53. *Ibid.*, 211.
54. *Ibid.*, 217.
55. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980), 37.
56. Jacques Ellul, "Search for an Image," trans. Henry Darcy and Gloria and Lionel Abel, *The Humanist* 33 (Nov.-Dec. 1973): 23.

# Where Mass Media Abound, The Word Abounds Greater Still

## -- Reflections on Robert Cole's Study of Children, Movies and Ethics

by Darrell J. Fasching  
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### Where Mass Media Abound Ethical Freedom Disappears -- Or Does It?

Jacques Ellul's analysis of the mass media's influence, at first glance, makes it seem as if we are without resources in a mass media civilization. The media, he suggests, rob us of our individuality and our capacity for critical thinking. Our thought and action become stereotypical. Consequently we lose our capacity for ethical reflection and action. For Ellul, our only hope lies in the power of the word to free us from our illusions. What I hope to show, with the help of Robert Coles recent work on the moral life of children, is that where media images abound, the word abounds greater still. Children, we usually assume, are less capable of critical thought and analysis and therefore are even more vulnerable to mass media imagery than adults. However, in *The Moral Life of Children* Coles shows that while children can indeed mouth the stereotypes of the adult mass media world they also show an amazing capacity for independent ethical reflection. Such reflection is often provoked by the media themselves, especially television and film.

As Ellul has pointed out, in a technical civilization we live immersed in a media environment so total and constant that it is virtually invisible. What is dangerous about this environment is that media make it possible to address individuals within the masses, creating the illusion of personal involvement while actually eliminating their individuality. To the degree that such persons rely on the media for information they are subjected to oversimplified characterizations of social and political situations. Complex issues are reduced to basic positive and negative options formed around stereotypes. The unique thoughts of the reflective self are replaced with a media generated collection of fragmentary stereotypical public opinions. There is no longer a progression from private to public opinion, says Ellul, "only from one state of public opinion to another state of that same public opinion."<sup>1</sup>

Television and film, especially, create an environment of images and illusions that short-circuit our ability to sustain critical distance. Rather than stimulating critical reflection, visual images bring thought to a halt. "A picture is worth a thousand words." The facts speak for themselves. Knowing becomes equated with "taking a look." All further reflection becomes unnecessary. The power of the news telecast is in giving us a feeling of presence, of immediateness, so we can see for ourselves. "Seeing is believing." One sees the facts, and having seen them, the issue is resolved. However, while seeing gives one the illusion of objectivity, it in fact totally abolishes the distance necessary for critical objective thought.

All of this brings about a fundamental mutation in our thought processes. Rational reflection is replaced by associative thinking. Films, photos, even words are used to evoke stereotypical feelings and reactions. The institutional infrastructure of society, says Ellul, is a "reality" legitimated by a superstructure or "sacred canopy" of images. The power of images, mediated through film and television, is such that we are removed from our everyday world of interpersonal interaction, where what we do has some effect, and placed

instead in a fictional world which presents itself as "reality." It is a non-dialogical world of one way communication which our thoughts and actions can never touch or influence. The end result of living in this "reality" is that we are totally immobilized and prevented from significantly affecting the shape of our social world.

The image integrates us into the illusion of that "reality". By contrast, the word makes us conscious of our separateness, our individuality, our freedom. The word inserts the creative tension of transforming freedom into the closed realm of mass media society. Although he needs to be challenged on this, Ellul argues that the very nature of the word elicits reasoning and analysis, freeing one from mesmerization by the image.<sup>2</sup> The word restores the personalizing dimension of time and memory and evokes our capacity for freedom and revolt. "The word," for Ellul, "must always remain a door opening to the Wholly Other."<sup>3</sup> As a result the word "is strictly contradictory to technique in every way."<sup>4</sup> It is through the word, Ellul suggests, that human sovereignty can be recovered over the domain of technique. It is not a matter of doing away with images. No human society can function without images. It is simply a matter of restoring a balance and with it the possibility of critical reflection.

Ellul's sociological analysis of the impact of mass media upon human freedom produces a discouraging perspective. Media seem to create an environment in which ethical freedom is impossible. The integration of the image and technique make Ellul very pessimistic about the possibilities of the word finding a place in the life of the individual who is immersed in a media environment. And yet, as Ellul himself argues, everything depends upon the individual. At the macro level of social analysis everything may seem determined and yet at the individual level freedom might yet be possible. Robert Coles work with the children of this mass media world in fact suggests that not only is freedom possible but it abounds. It abounds because the power of the word abounds in the lives of these children.

### The Word Abounds Greater Still

Robert Coles, who received a Pulitzer Prize for his series *Children of Crisis*, began his career by studying the impact of integration on black and white children in the South in the sixties. Since then he has studied the responses of children to crises in a variety of cultures. Recently this work has culminated in three important books -- *The Political Life of Children*, *The Moral Life of Children* and *The Spiritual Life of Children*.<sup>5</sup> In *The Moral Life of Children* he devotes a chapter to "Movies and Moral Energy" in which he suggests that both television and film can sometimes serve as important ethical resources for children, provoking their capacity for ethical reflection in unexpected ways.

In the sixties TV sets were found in the homes of southern children wherever he went. He reports that, annoyed by the common habit of leaving the TV on even when no one was watching, he once got up and turned off a TV set in an adjoining room. He did this because he wanted to conduct, without distraction, his interview with Ruby, a poor young black girl (age 6) who was a central figure in the forced integration of a white school in New Orleans. The mother

immediately got up and turned it back on. Later the child explained to him that the movies and serials kept her mama going in hard times. They apparently served this role for the daughter as well. She was one of a handful of black children being escorted to school everyday by federal marshals. Her trips to the movies in the midst of all this tension and hatred, she said, seemed "providential" (56). "There will be times, like now, when . . . they [her mother and father] wonder why God gave all this trouble to the Negro people, and the white people have a better time. Then my mother will remember something she's seen in the movie, and she says you musn't forget that the white people aren't all having such a good time, either" (57).

Movies, whether in the theater or on TV, are composed of more than just images. They are a balance of word and image. They are a form of storytelling which offers us opportunities to identify with others whose lives would otherwise be totally alien to our own. In so doing, we gain ethical perspective. They offer us, as well, the full range of human emotions to be explored and put into ethical perspective. Thus they provide occasions for ethical conversion and new life. Once an author completes a story, says Flannery O'Connor, it takes on a life of its own -- "You never know the new life that will result!" (59). With this thought in mind, Coles reflects on the role that movies played in preparing people to deal with integration. In the early sixties black and white families caught up in the integration controversy were seeing and discussing films like *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962).

Coles was struck by how some children related primarily to the race issue while others focused on the mother-daughter relationship in the film *Raisin in the Sun*. The black mother strikes her daughter for mocking the mother's belief in God. One child, an 8 year old white girl, responded by repeating the stereotypes of much of the adult world around her: "When the mother slapped her daughter and told her to believe in God, she was being smart. If you walk away from God, you're walking toward a lot of trouble. Maybe the colored will get into more and more trouble, because everyone is telling them they're bad off, and they believe it, and then there's trouble, like now, in our schools. If those people in the movie only listened to the mother, they'd be better off. The trouble was, even the mother wanted to move [i.e., into a better "white" neighborhood]. If she really believed in God, wouldn't she want to say right where she was?" (63). But Ruby comes to a different conclusion: "The mother can make her say it [i.e., 'there is a God'], but the daughter might not believe what she says. The mother smacked her daughter on the face, and our minister says you don't hurt someone, even if someone tries to hurt you, not if you believe in God" (62). A third child who viewed the film, failed to pick up on the mother-daughter conflict at all and reported the lesson of the movie was: "don't leave the South" (64).

No two children experienced the film in exactly the same way. Each filtered the film through the prism of his or her own inner life. Each took the film as an occasion to test the limits of his or her own moral worldview in some way. In the first case, it reinforced the mass stereotypes of the surrounding society; but in the case of Ruby, a deep ethical reflection occurred which allowed her to champion the importance of belief in God being uncoerced. Indeed lack of coercion becomes for her a test of authentic belief in God.

After seeing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Ruby was struck by the paradox that Boo Radley, whom everyone feared as crazy and potentially dangerous, turns out to be the protector of children. Ruby confesses: "I wasn't scared for the man, the negro they all were wanting to kill. I knew they'd want to get him, and so did he! . . . No, I was scared for the white kids, and I felt sorry for that man next door [Boo]. . . . My grandma said it's people like him who get a bad name, but they're good people; and it's the people standing out there in

front of the school, and they're the ones who are the bad people, but no one's calling them crazy. . . . They say they stand for everybody in the city. That's what one man tells me in the morning: 'Hey, you little nigger,' he says, 'I'm here for the whole of New Orleans to tell you off!' I just walk on, and I think of all the people I know in New Orleans who aren't like him. The poor man in the movie [Boo] -- if he lived in New Orleans he'd sure not be out on the street screaming at us." As Coles notes, here the film became for Ruby a vehicle for making an ethical distinction between appearance and reality which she applied to the world of her own persecution. It enabled her to have faith and go on, confident that at least some white people could be counted upon, like Boo, to be secretly on her side.

Far from arriving at a depersonalizing collectivist response, Ruby transcended black-white stereotypes to find hidden goodness among those who could have been viewed as all alike in their hatred. Thus, Coles concludes that "one is left with the mystery that takes place between each reader and each text, and each viewer and each film: the diversity of stimulation that emerges from several characters embedded in a complex plot, and the considerable latitude of awareness and moral concern in an audience" (65). Something can happen between the child and the film that cannot be accounted for by any psychology, sociology or even theology -- something that transcends these categories to engage the ethical and spiritual energy of the child. Perhaps it is something we could call grace or the power of the word. Drawing on this power, Ruby used the film story to call into question the stereotypical image of all whites as racist. Ruby even hoped that movies might be a force for redemption in a world divided by racial hatred: "I've been thinking, . . . 'If all the [white] people on the street [who were heckling her mercilessly] saw the movie they might stop coming out to bother us. . . . Because . . . the people in the movies would work on them, and maybe they'd listen.'" (65-66). "It is a mistake," says Coles, "to regard these children as mere moral puppets, driven by the workings of some contemporary sociodrama to hunt down cheap symbols in order to help express whatever psychological tensions were at work inside their heads. . . . The human mind in the first decade of life can conjure up the demonic even in the close at hand world of a small and familiar rural setting and that same mind may be instructed in the error of its way by life's events" (75-76).

The ethical imagination of these children draws out of these films what they need in order to reflect on the moral perplexities of their own lives. "It is not a matter of reflex reaction, a behavioral sequence of sociological and psychological stimuli finding their mark. Rather, those behavioral stimuli are, not infrequently, ignored, or absorbed in some broader moral visions of things that even small children seem unselfconsciously able to construct for themselves" (77). Although we are all supposedly "turned to putty" by the power of the media, says Coles, still "we have it within our power, young or old, to attend selectively, to summon a sense of proportion, to call upon humor and common sense, to assume a varying or even quite insistent critical distance from the subject under scrutiny in the film, and later, in a given mind's life" (77). As a 14 year old boy comments on traditional "cowboy and Indian" films: "I don't try to remember my American History . . . while I see the cowboys going after the Indians. But I don't forget my history, either. . . . People don't give you credit a lot of the time for having your head screwed on straight!" (78-79). This young boy from Albuquerque was in fact angered by the mistreatment the Indians had received and continued to receive at the hands of Anglos.

Far from automatically destroying our ethical freedom, films can be the occasions which provoke ethical reflection and heighten ethical sensibilities. Around the world, Coles, argues, "movies stir up" the ethical imagination. "I have found among rich children, poor

children, black children, white children, American children, children of Ireland or England or Brazil or South Africa, that all are intrigued by the mixture of release from the earth and the persistence of our earthly capacities for decency and for malice, for good deeds and bad deeds. The combination is irresistible. I could fill hundreds of pages of print with transcriptions of what I've heard children say about these films" (84). Movies can enable us to see ourselves through the eyes of others because they can seduce us into seeing the world as others see it, for both good and evil. These stories on film speak to us because we are all "wayfarers, wanderers, alarmed castaways, or transients who find ourselves here on earth, and trying to figure out the moral significance of that realization" (90). Movies can help us gain an ethical perspective on our situation. As Ruby put it: "I went to that movie and afterward I kept thinking of it, thinking and thinking, and the next day it made me wonder what I should do, and would I be doing right or wrong" (92).<sup>6</sup> Such ethical reflections are possible because our humanity resides in our inalienable capacity for language. As sign language testifies, not even the deaf and dumb can be robbed of their humanity. In their every gesture the word becomes flesh. Nothing can separate our humanness from this capacity for the word. Put theologically, no child of God is ever abandoned by the Word, for all things are created, held together and fulfilled through the Word in which we live, move and have our being. In a world of apparent necessity where the media abound, the gracious gift of the Word abounds greater still, making all things possible and all things new.

#### NOTES

1. *Propaganda*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972), p. 204.
2. Ellul exaggerates this link between word and reason. Ellul prefers the oral word over the written word, which is why he prefers Socrates over Plato and Aristotle. But a good deal of research on orality and writing would seem to call Ellul's claim here into question. Myth, as an imaginal language, is primarily an oral language. It is only with writing that critical rational reflection really became possible. Walter Ong persuasively argues that it is not the spoken word which promotes reason and analysis but the written word. See *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), especially chapters 3 and 4. I suspect that it is really the dialectical balance of movement back and forth between the written and the oral word that makes possible the Socratic critical reflection which Ellul so much admires. Although Socrates may not have left us any writings (apart from Plato), it is doubtful that he could have engaged in his critical dialogues in a totally oral culture. Hence the critical distance Ellul advocates as an antidote to mesmerization by media images can only occur through this kind of dialectical balance, which is exemplified in Ellul's own life as a teacher and an author, even if it is not fully accounted for in his own theoretical reflections.
3. *The Humiliation of the Word*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1985), p. 32.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
5. *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986), *The Moral Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986), *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).
6. Over the last several years I have developed a course on Religion, Ethics and Society in which we view and discuss a wide variety of contemporary films, such as *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Wall Street*, *Casualties of War* and *Do the Right Thing*. I have found that the interaction between word and image in such an approach leads to greater student involvement and insight than simply lecturing.

## Narrative Theology after Auschwitz

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by Darrell J. Fasching

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# Communication Theory In Ellul's Sociology

by Clifford G. Christians  
University of Illinois-Urbana

Since 1948 communication has played a prominent role in Ellul's sociology. Already in his thesis statement, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, Ellul isolated the problem of communication as central to understanding the contemporary age. As Joyce Hanks observes, *Propaganda* (1962) was the first of Ellul's books to give *la technique* an in-depth study.<sup>1</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man* (1970) was cast against today's crisis in language.

Ellul's long-term interest in communications makes *The Humiliation of the Word* an important laboratory for understanding his social philosophy. This volume is the site of my analysis here, and I work the territory with a sympathetic mind. *Propaganda* has been a formative book for me since I first read it in 1970. In contrast to superficial treatments innocent of the infrastructure--transmission views of communication in the behaviorist mode--Ellul situates the media in their socio-political context. He understands them as a technological and cultural form, and develops a normative framework light years beyond our commonplaces. He has almost singlehandedly moved the axis of propaganda studies away from overt intention among individuals to covert integration sociologically.

And I consider *Humiliation of the Word* an instructive book as well. Its major theme is unassailable--the need in our time to liberate language as an agent of human freedom. He privileges the *medium* throughout. He understands the significant fact that media technology itself is a central interpretive framework. McLuhan's aphorism -- the medium is the message -- in other words, he recognizes as a powerful notion. Ellul realizes that the technological form must be isolated on its own terms and not overlooked in our preoccupation with content. Ellul gives that notion his own inflection, recognizing a sea change occurs when media shift from books to television. And in his usually indomitable manner, his wide appeal to symbolic representation is stunning in scope.

I am argumentative in this article, but before outlining my dispute over *Humiliation of the Word* let me reiterate my profound appreciation for Ellul's scholarship. Without a philosophy of technology, the religious community stands emptyhanded regarding the mass media. Without a theory of technology, media instruments accommodate the status quo. Devoid of an explicit orientation regarding technology, the church co-opts media for the Great Commission and leaves the remainder--the so-called secular--untended. A Christian perspective on technology is the north star by which we can set our intellectual compass. Ellul contributes a mighty voice to our technological discourse, an arena where Christians find it difficult to shape the agenda.

Within that favorable pre-disposition, let me deconstruct *Humiliation of the Word* in the light of communication theory and investigate its possible contribution to mass media studies.

Similar to Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Ellul's book is set within an influential line of communication scholarship originating with the Canadian, Harold Innis.<sup>2</sup> This theory presumes that the history of communications is central to the history of civilization, that social change results from media transformations, that changes in communicative forms alter the structure of consciousness. Innis studied the introduction of papyrus, the printing press, radio, and the telegraph--and documented a bias (tendency, propensity, impulse) regarding space and time. Oral communication systems,

he argued, are biased toward time, rendering time continuous while making space discontinuous. Print systems, by contrast, are biased toward space, making geography continuous and breaking time into distinct units. As a minor premise, Innis argued for a monopoly of knowledge, that is, one form of communication tending to monopolize and rendering other forms residual rather than all communications media simply existing innocently alongside one another.

Innis' work on communication technology has been elaborated further by Marshall McLuhan, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Walter Ong, and James Carey. Thus from the introduction of cuneiform writing to today's fiber optics, media technologies have attracted considerable attention--scholars in the Innis tradition examining all significant shifts in technological form, identifying through them subsequent alterations in culture and in perception. Within this paradigm of bias in communication systems, the intellectual challenge is to identify the distinguishing properties of particular media technologies such as books, cinema, church sculpture, and satellites. As the physicist steps inside the world of atoms, matter and motion to understand them from the inside, the communications scholar, regarding television or magazines or audio cassettes must work deeply into their symbolic properties in order to know them fundamentally and distinctly as their own.

From the viewpoint of this important approach to communication scholarship, Ellul is raising the appropriate questions. His concern with hearing and seeing, with cinema and photography as compared to print, his fascination with the image--indicates a strong analysis located generatively.

Careful readers of *Humiliation of the Word* will note that Marshall McLuhan is Ellul's entree to this theoretical framework. He cites McLuhan approvingly on occasion and quarrels only with particular arguments. It ought not be read as merely an application of McLuhan, but as embodying the larger framework of which McLuhan is a representative. And my allusion to McLuhan enables me to initiate my argument.

McLuhan was Innis' successor at the University of Toronto. Whereas McLuhan continued the emphasis on the medium, Innis was broadly sociological and historical, and McLuhan intensely psychological in orientation. McLuhan's notions about visual closure, the sensorium, hot and cool, simultaneity, massage, and so forth, were formulated in narrowly psychological terms. His argument that television as a cool medium is a revolutionary force for global bonding, presumes a host of psychological claims about perception, mental processing of images, tactility, and the nervous system.

It is the uniform judgment of media scholars--pro and con--that McLuhan's provocative vocabulary and stunning insights about media systems finally turned disastrous. It begged too many questions about our physiological, mental, and psychological apparatus, and claimed more as a lay observer than even the most sophisticated students of the psychological arena could deliver.

Or, in slightly less perfunctory terms, Harold Innis' comprehensive sociological and historical framework has proved far more penetrating and enduring. By connecting media forms to social organization, power, empire, and bureaucracy, Innis dominated the field persuasively while McLuhan was entertained by Madison Av-

enue but already has been relegated to the dustbin of academic history.

The history of communication scholarship convinces me that Ellul is making a fatal mistake by orienting his argument around psychological motifs. Ellul's trademark has always been the social and historical contours, but in this book his references are decidedly McLuhanesque. Chapters 1, 3, 6 make the same overwrought conclusions about perception, consciousness, vision, and hearing that in the literature among communication scholars has yielded few definitive conclusions. With billions at stake in advertising revenue, for example, researchers have attempted to document attitude change and media impact on our psyches with little success. It is profoundly unsatisfying, in my opinion, for Ellul to assemble such a massive range of symbolic material and then locate it on the same frail reed as McLuhan's.

Again, the overall thesis is sound—about the critical importance of today's rush toward visual symbols. But the mountain of image data Ellul investigates must be reconstructed in terms of Innis. In *The Humiliation of the Word* Ellul works his sociological-theological counterpoint. His problematic in chapters 1-6 operates dialectically with his religious concerns of chapter 7—particularly in terms of the Gospel of John. Again, I am not disputing his counterpoint here, but contending that an Innis-like frame would irrigate the problematic and dramatically strengthen its application to religious life in the twentieth century.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Using a correspondence notion of truth, Ellul writes:

No longer are we surrounded by fields, woods, and rivers, but by signs, signals, billboards, screens, labels and trademarks: this is our universe. And when the screen shows us a living reality—such as people's faces or other countries—this is still a fiction: it is a constructed and recombined reality.... It produces acute suffering and panic; a person cannot be deprived of truth and situated in fiction (p. 228).

And in McLuhanesque fashion, Ellul draws this speculative conclusion:

The visual world leaves empty places (which usually bore the city dweller when he goes to the country. On the contrary, the sight of mountains or of the ocean is full and fills the eyes). But the universe manufactured by artificial images must keep itself filled up (143).

This line of argumentation is grounded in the assumption that an objective natural reality stands outside knowing subjects to give them a sense of stability. Given this reality which exists independently of our own human creations, the idea of principial truth is at least conceivable. Now that electronic forms of communication have multiplied dramatically and create an alternative environment of images, we have lost our sense of truthfulness altogether. Apparently word forms of communication in oral and print are less ambiguous than the visual, and could feed our understanding of truth by enabling thought processes to function. Instead we are inundated with impressions from visual symbols which dance in anarchy around our mind.

Ellul repeats in this volume an argument he develops more fully in *Propaganda*, a 1978 essay, and elsewhere. Whereas previous social orders operated with a triad—humans/tools/nature, in technological societies nature recedes and humans perceive themselves as living in a technical artifice. We have become aware that we do not exist in nature but in culture.

Man does not any longer live in a natural environment but rather in a milieu composed of the products of his technology.... He can no longer take any significant action without technological intermediation. Technology constitutes an engulfing universe for man, who finds himself in it as in a cocoon.<sup>3</sup>

The communications media represent the meaning-edge of the technological system, the arena where technique's soul is most clearly exposed. The media exhibit the structural elements of all technical artifacts, but their particular identity as a technology inheres in their function as bearers of symbols. Information technologies thus incarnate the properties of technology while serving as the agent for interpreting the meaning of the very phenomenon it embodies. Ellul calls our communication systems the "innermost, and most elusive manifestation" of human technological activity.<sup>4</sup> All artifacts communicate meaning in an important sense, but media instruments carry that role exclusively. As the media sketch out our world for us, organize our conversations, determine our decisions, and influence our self-identity, they do so with a technological cadence, massaging in our soul a technological rhythm and predisposition. In his scheme, the principle of efficiency which characterizes the technological enterprise as a whole also dominates the communications apparatus; the media do not transmit neutral stimuli, but they integrate us into the system. The mass media have become so powerful, Ellul argues, that congruity with the system is considered normal—even desirable—and we ironically declare that new ideas or alternative worldviews are ideologies or "just propaganda."

I have no fundamental quarrel with Ellul's contention that we live essentially in a technological artifice in which natural reality recedes. I am convinced also by the argument that mass media form the outermost ring of the technological system and organize the dialectic between humans and the technological order. But to characterize the visual media in *Humiliation of the Word* as a fictitious system of untrue images, cannot be sustained in terms of communication theory.

In Innis' historical and sociological orientation, the anchoring mode of communication is oral. Before the invention of the alphabet in 1500 B.C., civilization was exclusively oral, and until the rise of the printing press in the 16th century, human society was predominantly oral. Even today, nearly half of the world's languages have not been reduced to writing. Ellul puts image and word in contradiction; the word versus the visual is the focus of Ellul's analysis. He prefers oral words over print, but given his emphasis on words themselves, he blurs the critical distinction between the verbal and written. Innis would complain that in spite of Ellul's predisposition toward speech, he fails to recognize how irretrievably and congenitally communication is embedded in sound. Neil Postman, who worries with Ellul about today's overweening visualization, at least recognizes that the antidote is print. Print media are the best transmitters of linear logic and systematic discourse. While most communication scholars do not agree with Postman's anti-television bias, he understands accurately the disjunctions among orality, print, and electronic systems.

Oral life is our common property, language spoken and heard God's gift exclusively to the human species. All normal humans naturally learn to speak and hear; none needs the educational skills for print or the economic means to buy electronic equipment. Printed words and electronic images are both derived from speech. The multi-dimensional acoustical world of sound is ear-oriented, and not sight driven (as with print and electronics). In a long footnote on McLuhan (pp. 26-27), Ellul notes the distinction between a communication of hearing and one of sight, but then dismisses McLuhan as erroneous. Ellul misconstrues the issues here and draws the outrageous conclusion that McLuhan's only illustration of acoustical communication is music. Precisely at this point, Innis' historical framework keeps our priorities on oral communication and prevents dead-ended speculation whether visual systems are fictive, and speech and writing realistic.

In an oral society, the referent is another human. The framing device in communication is not natural reality, but humanity. Oral communication creates presence, it binds humans into social groups. And oral communication in principle works in the binding mode, whether in exclusively oral, predominantly oral, or residually oral (e.g. our mass-mediated civilization today) social systems. Printed text and electronic images are both secondary forms, actually more similar to each other than either is to orality.

Ellul's insistence that images are illusory leads him to his well-known rejection of technicism in chapter 7. He warns the church not to sacralize images, but to destroy those visual icons that steer us toward commercialism and efficiency. And such prophetic warnings are pertinent and totally necessary. But chapter 7 finally amounts to little more than urging the religious community to see in the biblical sense of concentrating on the divine invisible, knowing that in the apocalyptic moment such seeing will at last be realized.

A more adequate final chapter would urge the church to concentrate on visual literacy. Granted the church faces a Himalayan task of maintaining its theological vitality while at this historical moment electronic systems gain superior power over print. But the buffer for this transformation is training in visual literacy. Presumably Ellul's point is that a culture overweeningly dependent on electronic imagery needs a critical consciousness; those who are visually literate actually have that capacity, at least in principle. Possessors of the eternal message may only create the dissonance of a foreign language, if they insist on abundant words for addressing visual culture. Speaking prophetically to a visual age requires a visual cadence. If we are willing to make the same educational commitment to school one another in visual systems as we have in print, the world of images will no longer seem like alien territory.

While increasingly the complexities of our age are cast in picture form, that does not mean we cannot comprehend them critically. The visual mind seizes not the minute parts but the story as an organic whole. Visual grammar centers on "a syntax of spatial relationships" with the "goal of achieving a Gestalt, an effectively unified message."<sup>5</sup> The visually literate catch a stream or grasp several images simultaneously. Traffic lights are not mistaken for Christmas decorations and audiences know that cowboys in white hats will save the day. Last year, 1.1 billion books were checked out of American libraries, but 1.2 billion videos were rented. As Ellul would insist correctly, these statistics are not neutral facts, but telling social indicators. Generations are emerging at present which might not be print literate. However, not all are bamboozled, even though our educational system in general and our literacy training in particular have not been reoriented as yet. People whose primary means of coherence are visual deserve an adequate framework for developing their visual competence, not dismissed as incapable of reflective thought.

Imagine one million dollars in my hand -- a stack of 100 dollar bills four inches high. That is a visual statement. A friend of mine describes his adolescent days as a photograph out of focus. That's visual imagery. Human cognition can be viewed as a cycle of dawn and dusk -- creation and reflection. Or from the poet: "The human heart is a small town where people live." Visual thinking. And Ecclesiastes 12: "Before the silver cord snaps, and the golden bowl is broken at the cistern." The technological artifice which is our modern home creates complexities of an extraordinary sort. The tide is turning relentlessly toward electronic communication, now only dimly understood. It is not clear at this stage what relationships exist between the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions of a visual text, but film, television, and photography. But why not busy ourselves with the awesome task of understanding their particular grammars, their properties, elements, and systemic features?

The history of communication scholarship convinces me that Ellul draws an erroneous conclusion about fiction and reality, and fails to grasp the nature of oral versus mediated language. His urgent tone and penetrating style at least indicate the seriousness of our current shift to visual technology. But rather than issue tedious ultimatums on the image's role in our modern malaise, I believe our task centers on enabling visual media to become aesthetically superior. Television and cinema, for example, should be assisted in becoming distinctive popular art. Critical consciousness is our educational mission, regardless of the symbolic forms that dominate a historical period.

Communication theory suggests that we can develop a sense of truthfulness through visual literacy within an environment of images. Structural evil remains much too entrenched for breezy sleights of hand. But convictions born of the Spirit, a ventilated conscience, a morally honed life can flourish within a visual habitat as well as it did on occasion in pre-visual societies. While the overall mass-mediated system seems nearly impregnable, that does not preclude the visually literate from living with honor and authenticity. *Humiliation of the Word* allows that possibility only by default.

## Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, Trans. Joyce M. Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. ix.
2. Cf. Harold Innis' two major works on communications technology, *Empire and Communications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), and *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).
3. Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, October 1978, p. 216.
4. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. xvii.
5. Linda Schamber, "Core Course in Visual Literacy for Ideas, Not Techniquis," *Journalism Educator*, Spring 1991, p. 18; she cites the basic text for educators, such as Donis A. Dondis, *A Primer of Visual Literacy* and Deborah Curtiss, *Introduction to Visual Literacy*. See Michael Griffin in the same issue of *Journalism Educator*, "Defining Visual Communication for a Multimedia World," for a review of the theoretical work since Walter Benjamin and William Ivins in the 1930s (pp. 9-15).

# Book Reviews

***Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media* by Quentin J. Schultze, Roy M. Anker, et al. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991. Paperback, 347 pages.**

This book is based on the premise that "most adults have not really considered how they themselves have conspired among themselves, with the electronic media, and with various social institutions to make life increasingly difficult for youth" (p. 2). The authors attempt to investigate how young people, the electronic media and popular culture interact in contemporary North American society.

"Our thesis is that youth and the electronic media today are dependent on each other. The media need the youth market, as it is called, for their own economic survival. Youth, in turn, need the media for guidance and nurture in a society where other social institutions, such as the family and the school, do not shape the youth culture as powerfully as they once did" (pp. 11-12). The book takes a long and detailed look at the history of North American youth culture, how communication technologies have affected the cultural and social environment, the rise of youth culture in the 1950s and 1960s, portraits of rock music, rock videos, music television (MTV), and teenage films. Finally, the authors discuss the role of leisure in contemporary culture and offer guidelines to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of popular art for youth and adults.

The book is an entertaining but sometimes repetitive account of the difficult interaction between youth and adults. Here lies the first problem. Although the authors are at pains to identify youth, reading the evidence for their arguments in the chapters themselves produces the eerie feeling that there is no real distinction. An adult seems to be a youth who has been initiated into the mysteries of sex and work. The transition period, which used to be called adolescence, has been engulfed by the electronic consumer industry for its own profit. The authors comment that "many young people are anchored in a specialised media world, a youth subculture, that gives their lives meaning but at the same time distances them from their own family life" (p. 47). While this is especially true for youth, it is no less true for adults. Wherein lies the real distinction?

The main argument of the book, as already noted, is that youth and the entertainment media exist in symbiosis. "North American youth and the entertainment media together form a quasi-educational culture -- a culture that is about youth and for youth and for profit. The entertainment industry makes money from the symbiosis, while youth acquire the maps that help them steer their way through the troubled and confusing waters of teenage life" (p. 78). This seems to be a positive statement. If the entertainment industry is really helping youth to steer through troubled waters, all well and good. In fact it is not, and the authors seem to be caught in the ambivalence of wanting to be on the side of youth, liking what youth likes and yet being critical of it at the same time. Of course, that's the trap for adults who are really youth in disguise.

The moralistic overtones of the authors' Calvinist background come through in several places. Their Christian perspective is one reason for their concern, which is made clear in the Preface. However, this bias leads them to make claims for traditional sources of moral authority which they fail to justify. "So much entertainment geared directly and persuasively toward youth has effectively redefined the roles of traditional institutions in the nurture of youth. Amid the powerful presence of popular entertainment, the influence of family, school and church in the instruction of successive genera-

tions has declined dramatically" (p. 109). But this is too simple, despite the wealth of evidence brought to bear. People live their lives on many levels, in different ways. The entertainment industry is only one aspect of contemporary culture.

The chapters on rock music, rock videos, MTV and teenage films provide a lot of interesting information. The authors demonstrate that these are not "adequate bases for true community, meaningful identities, strong intimacies and high moral purpose" (p. 210). But in amply proving their point, they do not show how family, school and church should behave to counter-balance the impact of youth culture. The last two chapters discuss the leisure revolution and the problem of evaluating popular art morally and religiously. In some ways, these seem to stand apart from the preceding chapters. Their themes are related to youth, but apply equally to adulthood. What this reviewer misses is a chapter drawing together the various threads of the arguments and proposing a counter-revolution. If families and communities, together with education and religion, are to be the source of real identity in a pluralistic and divided society, then they need clear guidelines. These are not apparent in this book.

*Dancing in the Dark* is rich in detail, but at times rather dense. A book written by six authors is like a soup made by six chefs. A good editor might have turned a potage into a consommé. Nevertheless, it is still rewarding and gives cause for profound reflection.

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***Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture, and the Media* by William F. Fore. New York: Friendship Press, 1990. Paperback. 150 pages, index.**

William Fore, currently teaching at Yale Divinity School, has written many pages in his distinguished career as church statesman and media scholar. This book reads like a summation of his years of thinking, teaching, and travel -- a tour of his reflections on how and why the Christian gospel makes sense on TV and in film, and when it doesn't.

A worthy summation it is. From his culturalist perspective, Fore calls on the right set of theorists for the issues raised his focus on religion and media. From McLuhan and Innis he adopts the idea of a "sea change" sweeping across North America in 1844, the year of the telegraph. From Gerbner's cultural indicators project and Donnerstein's lab studies, Fore writes intelligently and modestly about media effects. From Eisenstein and Ong he culls broader notions of perception and cultural change. Fore weaves semiotics, political economy, and popular culture approaches into his analysis of media. He raises questions about media monopoly, the wisdom of televangelism, and omnipresent commercial messages. He calls on churches to educate members to "read television" and resist its secularity. He urges media mummies to come alive by producing their own video stories. In all, Fore advocates an activist stance toward media problems, energized by an optimism that electronic media offer a potential for human beneficence yet to be tapped.

Fore's theological moorings are all within "mainstream" protestantism, and here a longer review might probe some weaker spokes in the wheel. I suggest only two areas that strike me as worth a late

afternoon talk in New Haven, or wherever in the world one can catch up with Mr. Fore.

First, the thorny quagmire of the public's role in correcting excessive sex and violence on TV, cable, and videocassettes. For problems so entrenched and so conspicuous, Fore's solutions are exceedingly calm. He urges stronger industry self-regulation (including descriptive flags on R-rated material), stockholder action, and (did we hear him right?) boycotts. On that last point, we must point out, Fore shares turf with Christian conservatives who claim that economic sparring is the only game corporate executives know to play. Fore's suggestion here seems disingenuous, as he provides only negative examples of boycott action and actually compares the tactic to inquisitions and Holy Wars. "Thou shalt not," reads Fore's commandment, "abuse [thy] privilege by attempting to dictate what is said on the air," a comment surely aimed at all successful media boycotters from the Legion of Decency to the American Family Association.

On media violence, Fore seems content to rest his case on the reasonableness of corporate leaders' good will. He is much less sanguine, however, on questions related to media imperialism and cigarette advertising. Here he seeks government intervention and the gentle muscle of the organization over which he presided until recently, the World Association of Christian Communications. Is this strategy adequate to dislodge the mentality which produces more sexually and violently explicit programming each season? There is reason to wonder.

Second, for talk time in New Haven: theological foundations of culture, symbol, and knowledge. Tillich is rightly cited first, and Newbigin enriches Fore's argument. But on such matters as the nature of meaning, the role of story, public policy and faith, and the crux of the Christian gospel, there exists a range and breadth of theological thinking conspicuous by its absence. Is the point of the gospel to "free people" (from what?) to find happiness in work, play, and family? Is it indeed impossible to uncover a "real gospel story," given cultural bounds? Are there "no meanings except as people give meanings"? On these questions, the likes of Bonhoeffer, Neuhaus, McGrath, and more of Newbigin would help round and deepen the argument.

I believe Ellul's critique of *la technique* would play a formative role here in clarifying relations between public and corporation, qualifying Fore's confidence in reasonableness while problematizing Fore's conservative counterparts. But such must wait for longer reviews than this, and longer books than *Mythmakers*. Read this one as a thoughtful, intelligent summary of television research, its institutional handicaps, and its role in religious pedagogy.

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***Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions***  
by Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover, eds. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp. Cloth, 1990, 366 pages.

Religious television has been a topic of discussion and debate for several decades. Much of this has been based on subjective likes or dislikes, though some analysis has been rooted in more general observations about religion and communication. This book represents the latter type. It is an attempt to present factual findings and a wide range of scholarly reflections on the issue of religious television. Twenty-five competent specialists in the field of mass communications research and practice contributed in order to cover the field. Two of these are the editors of the book. Of these 25 contributors, one is from Australia and one from Great Britain; the others

are based in the United States. The book is divided into nine major sections. In order to provide continuity, each section starts with a brief editorial sum-up of the key aspects of the particular issue being considered.

The person reviewing this book has observed and studied religious television in the USA during two visits to the country in 1955-56 and 1978-79. This book has helped me get an updated and solid base upon which I could reassess my understanding of the nature and the role of religious television in the USA at the present moment. The book is a fresh blend of factual information and thought-provoking analysis.

The contributors are on the whole very critical towards what has been named the electronic church. But many are hostile toward it now, as a result of the sex and finance scandals among some televangelists. In my opinion, this book provides premises for a critical attitude towards the electronic church that is totally independent of the negative reaction that highly visible scandals naturally create. I shall mention some of these premises.

- The electronic church creates a superficial enemy image. Those who disagree with its leaders are labeled enemies.
- Reductionism. Not a full biblical message because it constantly concentrates on a health and wealth perspective where the audience is told to be a winner, getting its just due, luxury, health and prestige.
- An authoritarian approach to the audience. There is no place for dialogue. Talking and listening to each other are impossible. In fact, these programs often are designed to force and manipulate their audiences.
- Giving a false picture of the American family situation.
- Unclear with regard to religion and politics.
- No serious reflection on conviction and tolerance in a multicultural society.
- Using the media to collect money in a very aggressive way.

Looking at the list above, I too react strongly against the electronic church theologically as well as from a communication point of view. It certainly is not a full gospel that is proclaimed. Many Biblical aspects are not taken seriously in these broadcasts. I feel, however, that the electronic church need not take on this character. It continues a tradition that was started by Bishop Fulton Sheen and Norman Vincent Peale. They were authoritarian in a soft and friendly way, they also were very selective in their message. They dominated and impressed the audience, and shocked some, by their superficiality. But on the American scene I also have met fine religious television programs which communicate well, for example, Billy Graham's preaching and the Lutheran program "This is the Life."

The discussion about the electronic church and its weaknesses should challenge mainstream churches to reconsider their way of using religious television. Rather than condemning it all wholesale, it must be done with integrity. Of course, manipulation must be out in religious television. A meeting of minds and dialogue must replace it, and we must search for ways to accomplish that.

I want to close with the words of a Dutch media professional who says: "Your beliefs, your religious world, can only be spread to a larger audience when you understand their world as well." The book *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions* underlines in a strong and competent way the need for religious television in which meeting other minds is taken seriously.

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# Dissertations

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***The Hope Of Intervention: A Rhetorical Analysis Of The English Translations Of The Writings Of Jacques Ellul*, by James Wesley Baker, Ph.D. The Ohio State University, 1991. Professor William R. Brown, Advisor.**

This study calls attention to the "humanities critique" of the convergence of communication technologies by explicating the work of Jacques Ellul, whose writings long have recognized the integrating nature of technology. The purpose of the study is to clarify Ellul's goals in writing about *la technique*, which he defines as "efficient methods applicable in all areas."

The thesis is that Ellul is engaged in the rhetoric of social intervention. His writings promote an intervention by his readers into the technological system by challenging the ideological assumptions they make about technology.

In developing a framework by which Ellul may be understood, the study presents Organicism as his way of organizing knowledge, General Systems Theory as the theoretical base he uses to conceptualize the way *la technique* operates, and the Social Intervention Model (SIM) as a way of studying the pragmatic approach he takes in his books and articles. The SIM highlights Ellul's overall goal of intervening into our understanding of the place of *la technique* in our era. As part of this intervention, he is promoting a change in our attention from technologies-as-means to *la technique*-as-system, an awareness of our need for symbolization in order to control the growth of the system, and an ethics of non-power which is willing to say "no" to the inevitability of technological growth.

Contrary to most assessments of Ellul as a pessimist, the study presents Ellul's insistence on hope. This hope results from the possibility of an "exterior intervention" through a religious perspective, since God is the only one who is completely outside the system.

The study concludes that Ellul's purpose in writing can be understood when one sees the dialectic between his sociological and religious works. His rejection as too pessimistic by communication scholars comes as a result of reading only one part of his analysis. Although his refusal to engage in an artificial synthesis between the two poles of his thought prevents him from providing easy solutions to the problems we face, Ellul makes us aware of the constant tension in which we live today.

***The Technological City: 1984 In Singapore*, By Lawson Liat-Ho Lau, University of Illinois-Urbana, 1991. Professor Clifford G. Christians, Advisor.**

Ellul organizes his analysis of modern society around a macro concept: *la technique*. This dissertation presupposes that Ellul's brainchild is seminal in nature although viewpoints of his work -- both sociological and theological -- fluctuate considerably. Barbed differences in evaluation arise in part because of Ellul's markedly polarizing prophetic voice. An increasingly technological planet that often sings the praises of technology, however, is in dire need of an incisive commentator and interpreter. This macro-level dissertation sets his work within the context of a specific country: the Republic of Singapore. Ellul's concept of *la technique* has considerable explanatory power. It is a principle that provides a frame with which to synthesize a large number of political, economic, educational, media, legal, religious events or policies. On the one hand it furnishes a sophisticated theoretical structure. On the other hand it grapples with experiences and phenomena, that is, with reality.

From 1959-1990, the city-state of Singapore has been ruled by one political party, the People's Action Party, under prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. Lee has always been anxious that Singapore make rapid advances into the world of technology; he wants it to continue its competitive edge, and, more recently, to amass ever-increasing foreign reserves. Technological progress and hence economic prosperity have been achieved largely through particular ways in which Singapore society has been molded by the PAP. Lee Kuan Yew has over three decades established the PAP as the hegemonic political structure in Singapore. He has assiduously organized and exploited Singapore's human resources so as to maximize the yield of both the people and the technologies. Scholars of Singapore have acknowledged it as a country where social engineering is practiced unabashedly as a political craft. Since 1959, the PAP has been committed to that which is politically expedient; ideology and principles are subservient to any course of action that is construed to be the most efficient. As Ellul constantly notes, ideology is secondary when technique is dominant.

Chapter One, "The People's Action Party and *La Technique: A Marriage of Convenience*," organizes a diverse range of events and policies in Singapore around Ellul's contention that the hallmark of technique is efficiency and that technique has a totalitarian disposition. It contends that Lee Kuan Yew could well be Ellul's paradigm of the politician-technician. Chapter Two, "Truth and Falsehood: Propaganda in an Authoritarian State," focuses on the pervasive presence of political and sociological propaganda in the manifestly elitist one-way flow of information in Singapore. Ellul argues that propaganda must be total. The PAP Government regards uncompromising governmental control of the media as an efficient way of not only propagating its policies but also of checking the spread of "falsehoods." Chapter Three, "Efficiency and Wealth Versus Values and Culture," deals with the dominance of technique over values and culture. It explores two of Ellul's interrelated concerns -- first, that "in our society everything has become political" and second, that the structures of political parties have assumed bureaucratic forms. Chapter Four, "1984: A Breakdown of Efficiency's Telescreen" refers to the 1984 general election in Singapore when an increase of a relatively massive twelve percent of Singaporeans voted against the PAP Government. Chapter Five, "The Individual in Community Versus Technique," examines alternatives to the dehumanizing effects of *la technique*. A political system that unrelentingly strives for efficiency at all levels of existence and propagandizes its efficiency ethic through a system of punitive punishments and rewards over three decades cannot but mold many so insidiously in its totalitarian image that they are either virtually unaware of being PAP commodities or have acquiesced to it. With education to counteract propaganda, Singaporeans could take steps to restore their humanity.

## Bibliographic Notes On Theology And Technology

Austin, Richard Cartwright. *Environmental Theology*. Book 1: *Baptized into Wilderness: A Christian Perspective on John Muir*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987. Pp. 103. Book 2: *Beauty of the Lord: Awakening the Senses*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 225. Book 3: *Hope for the Land: Nature in the Bible*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. Pp. ix, 262. Book 4: *Reclaiming America: Restoring Nature to Culture*. Abington, VA: Creekside Press, 1990. Pp. 243. (John Knox Press having moved to Louisville, KY, and having failed adequately to handle the books 1-3, all four books are now available through Creekside Press, P.O. Box 331, Abington, VA 24210.) To date, the most comprehensive environmental theology yet written. Can be read separately. "Book 1, *Baptized into Wilderness* . . . , invites Christians to deeper . . . relationships with nature and illustrates principle themes of the series through the life and reflection of John Muir, America's first advocate of wilderness protection. Book 2, *Beauty of the Lord* . . . , is . . . to help Christians dissolve impediments to expressive interactions with life on this earth. Through a dialogue with Jonathan Edwards, founding philosopher of the American evangelical tradition, it concludes that experience of beauty may knit us to God and to the natural world as well" (Book 3, p. 237). Books 1 and 2 provide historical and theological background. Book 1 interprets Muir as anonymous Christian; Book 2 provides a serious spiritual reading of Edwards as anonymous environmentalist. Books 3 and 4 then turn to the Bible and personal ethics. Book 3 is a challenging, original exegesis of the place of nature in the scriptural revelation. "Because the Scriptures express moral relationships among God, humanity, and the full range of life and life-support on this planet, they can help inform our faith and guide our conduct amid the modern environmental crisis. Hebrews developed a complex understanding of the relationships among species sharing the same habitat a moral perspective, not a technical theory which I call *biblical ecology*. Liberation is my opening theme. God began work of salvation by rescuing from oppression and sin those who would come to know and serve the Lord; and the biblical liberation includes not just oppressed people but also oppressed lands. The words *covenant* and *promise* apply to the range of created life as well as to human beings" (Book 3, pp. 4-5). Reflection on liberation is followed by exegesis toward our creativity, sabbath ecology, the fall, and ecological visions in both the Hebrew and Greek scriptures. Book 4 brings the *Environmental Theology* series "to the point of acting . . . . Here strategies are formulated to embrace nature within American culture, to protect our distinctive landscapes, to curb America's huge appetite for earth's resources, and to reduce our impact upon the biosphere. The volume also proposes reform within Christian Churches so that our worship and witness may become relevant to the environmental crises that threatens all God's creation" (Book 4, pp. 1-2). Each volume includes narrative "Suggestions for Reading," Notes, Index, and Biblical Citations. Volume 4 has as well an "Index to Series Themes" (pp. 239-243) that complements the "Series Relationships" analysis for Volume 3, pp. 237-239.

Bakke, Ray. *The Urban Christian*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987. Pp. 200. Develops a pastoral theology for effective urban missionaries today. Topics range from "Building Decision-Making Muscle" to "Networking the World." Optimistic about adapting the ways of the world.

Basney, Lionel. "Ecology and the Scriptural Concept of the Master," *Christian Scholar's Review* 3, no. 1 (September 1973), pp. 49-50. Brief critique of the Lynn White thesis. "Man's 'mastery' in the world is therefore ambivalent, qualified both by divine limit and by the ethical implications of God's work of salvation. The Incarnation teaches that Christ, 'Master' . . . was at the same time the 'servant' of all" (p. 49).

Birch, Charles. "How Brave a New World?" *Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 1 (January 1985), pp. 152-160. "Despite appearances we are not in the grasp of a technological determinism that closes our options forever" (p. 152). Birch outlines the features of a science and technology for a sustainable, global society in which (1) an ecological model replaces a mechanistic model, (2) the value of persons is included in risk/benefit analyses, (3) richness of experience becomes equal in value to consumption of goods, (4) science becomes democratic instead of elitist, (5) science and technology will serve global instead of national and local goals, and (6) technology will become non-violent.

Birch, Charles. "The Scientific-Environmental Crisis; Where Do the Churches Stand?" *Ecumenical Review* 40, no. 2 (April 1988), pp. 185-193. "The ambiguity of the effects of science and technology has two sources. On the one hand as knowledge grows arithmetically our ignorance grows geometrically . . . . Secondly, the ambiguity of science and technology is tied to . . . the mechanistic model of science . . . . As a methodology mechanistic science has been highly successful. But as a metaphysics of nature it has had disastrous consequences" (pp. 189-190).

Birtel, Frank T., ed. *Religion, Science, and Public Policy*. New York: Crossroad, 1987. Pp. xiii, 152. Eight essays from three series of lectures at Tulane University. Contents: A.R. Peacocke's "Rethinking Religious Faith in a World of Science" and "The Disguised Friend Biological Evolution and Belief in God," Langdon Gilkey's "Is Religious Faith Possible in an Age of Science?" Stephen Toulmin's "Religion and the Idea of Nature," Richard S. Westfall's "Newton and Christianity," Karl E. Peters' "Toward a Physics, Metaphysics, and Theology of Creation: A Trinitarian View," Philip Hefner's "Sociobiology and Ethics," and John T. Noonan Jr.'s "The Bishops and the Ruling Class: The Moral Formation of Public Policy." Most articles deal with religion-science relation. Only Hefner's and Noonan's consider public and church policy, respectively. Peacocke's and Hefner's essays have been published elsewhere. Gilkey repeats *Religious and Scientific Future* (1970). Peters summarizes the editorial interests of *Zygon*. Only Westfall and Toulmin break new ground. Poorly and unevenly edited.

Boys, Mary C. "Religious Education in the Age of New Communication Technologies," *Media Development* 32, no. 2 (1985), pp. 29-32. Religious education can use new telecommunication technologies, but to do so requires critical and imaginative appropriation if the Gospel is really going to be communicated.

Chandler, David H. "Energy: Toward More Ethical Alternatives," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11, no. 2 (December 1982), pp. 112-123. Theological defense of ecology followed by a section on

detailed practical steps Christians should adopt such as earth sheltering, passive solar design, etc.

Christians, Clifford G. "A Cultural View of Mass Communications: Some Explorations for Christians," *Christian Scholar's Review* 7, no. 1 (September 1977), pp. 3-22. "Given the ferment within contemporary media research, . . . the Christian community cannot simply imbibe the 'received view' uncritically" (p. 9). "Communications theory desperately needs a prophetic voice" (p. 22). Proposes what is called "a cultural approach" animated by the Calvinist theology of the cultural mandate to meet this need. Contemporary communications research is based on the idea of humanity as "a bundle of biological drives and physical senses" (p. 16), whereas "culturalism recognizes that communicative bonds are moral bonds" (p. 15).

"Church Statements on Communication," *Media Development* 31, no. 1 (1984), pp. 1-36. Includes statements by the Swiss churches, the World Council of Churches, by a group of bishops and others from Brazil, by the Church of Finland, by Lutherans, communications persons from Latin America and the Caribbean, by Asian Catholic bishops, by Latin American bishops, and by Bishop George Moser of Rottenburg and Stuttgart, President of the Communication Commission of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference. Following are Larry Jorgenson's "Church Statements on Communication: Their Place in a Process," John Bluck's "Ecumenical Debate on Communication: A New Beginning," and Virginia Stem Owens' "Was Christ the 'Perfect Communicator'?"

"The Church and the Computer." *Review and Expositor* 87, no. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 181-299. Contents: "Editorial Introduction," Richard L. Gorsuch's "Computers: The Old/New Problem of Dominion," Glen H. Stassen's "A Computer-Ethical Call to Continuous Conversion," David T. Britt's "Computers and the Southern Baptist Convention," and J. Ralph Hardee's "Computers and Local Congregations." There are also three appendices by Hardee on "Church Administration Software," "Church Computing Resources," and a "Glossary."

Dietrich, Jeff. "Discerning This Fateful Hour," *Catholic Agitator* 20, no. 5 (June 1990), pp. 1-2. This is the first of three articles by Dietrich considering the implications of Ellul's thought for the Catholic Worker movement. Each article is supplemented by reprints from Ellul and others. See also: "Jacques Ellul and the Catholic Worker of the Next Century: Therefore Choose Life," *Catholic Agitator* 20, no. 6 (July 1990), pp. 1-2; and "The New Nazi Eugenics Bio-Technology Engineering," *Catholic Agitator* 20, no. 7 (August 1990), pp. 1-2. The original article is reprinted, along with an interview with Dietrich, in *Catholic Worker* 57, no. 6 (September 1990), pp. 1 and 4.

Dreyer, Elizabeth. "Toward a Spirituality of Work," *New Theology Review* 2, no. 2 (May 1988), pp. 53-65. Impressionistic reflection on work in relation to experience of community, as opportunity for practicing the presence of God and the dark nights, as means to self-knowledge. Considers also the possibility of a specifically Christian "way" at work. Argues the need to be honest about the many dimensions and ambiguities of work.

Eldson, Ron. "A Still-bent World: Some Reflections on Current Environmental Issues," *Science and Christian Belief* 1, no. 2 (October 1989), pp. 99-121. Issues in environmental management pose threats to the continued well-being of humanity and creation.

On the basis of the many secular and Christian publications in recent years, reflection suggests a number of special questions for a biblical theology of creation, fall, and redemption. Such questions focus the character of scientific processes, the prediction of the future, and the problems of risk analysis. This approach offers the opportunity for Christians to engage in dialogue with others involved in decision making at a time when governments are increasingly sensitive to public concern over environmental problems.

"The Environment: Caring for God's Creation." *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 1-57. Contents: Roy J. Enquist's "In This Issue" (pp. 2-3), Clay E. Peters' "Blueprint for the Environment" (pp. 4-9), I. Garth Youngberg's "Agriculture and the Environment: New Directions in the Search for Sustainability" (pp. 10-14), Peggy H. Knight's "The Task of the Environmental Protection Agency" (pp. 15-20), Paul F. Bente Jr.'s "An Environmentalist's Assessment of the EPA" (pp. 21-26), Karen L. Bloomquist's "Creation, Domination and the Environment" (pp. 27-31), "Panel: The Responsibility of Business for the Environment" (which includes W. J. Hindman's "A Prescient Entrepreneur Reflects," Ernest S. Rosenberg's "Moral Responsibility for Environmental Protection," and James A. Nash's "Six Criteria for Environmental Responsibility," pp. 32-36, 37-44, and 45-48, respectively), Paul F. Bente Jr.'s "Becoming a Responsible Entity in God's Creation" (pp. 49-56), and Paul F. Bente Jr.'s "A Sample Letter" (p. 57).

Ferré, Frederick. "Technology and Religion," chapter 7 in *Philosophy of Technology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), pp. 97-116. Good brief review of mythic images of technology, arguments for and against on the dependency of modern technology on Judeo-Christian theology, and some views of relations between non-Western religions and technology.

Fore, William F. *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values, and Culture*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987. Pp. 219. Television has replaced the church as cultivator of contemporary culture. A diagnosis and etiology plus realistic strategies for the church to serve in a society where the TV dominates. Creative and subversive strategies emerge from the Niebuhr models of "Christ transforming culture" and "Christ and culture in paradox."

Freedman, Benjamin. "Leviticus and DNA: A Very Old Look at a Very New Problem," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 105-113. An examination of "Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with diverse kind; thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed" (Leviticus 19:19). After a survey of classical commentaries, concludes that the traditional Jewish prohibition against hybridization is limited and does not apply to DNA engineering, but admits there are other possible interpretations.

Girard, René. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987. Pp. 469. Within an exhaustive overview of Girard's theories of the victimage mechanism and mimetic desire, the relation of science, Christianity, and violent apocalypse is discussed on pp. 253-262. Christianity's demythologization of sacrificial ritual mechanisms has revealed the human origin of violence. However, nuclear warfare now replaces the ancient sacrificial system. "In a world that is continually losing its sacred character, only the permanent threat of immediate and total destruction can prevent men from destroying one another. Once again, violence prevents violence from breaking out" (p. 255). Nuclear warfare even takes its names from the "direct divinities in



Greek mythology, like Titan, Poseidon, and Saturn, the god who devoured his own children. We who sacrifice fabulous resources to fatten the most inhuman form of violence . . . how can we have the extraordinary hypocrisy to pretend that we do not understand all those people who did such things long before us: those, for example, who made it their practice to throw a single child, or two at the most, into the furnace of a certain Moloch in order to ensure the safety of the others?" (p. 256).

Gosling, David. "Towards a Credible Ecumenical Theology of Nature," *Ecumenical Review* 38, no. 3 (July 1986), pp. 322-331. Notes emphasizing the importance of the "integrity of nature."

Greenberger, Robert S. "What's Up in Israel? Elevators, Thanks to a Special Institute," *Wall Street Journal* (December 3, 1990), pp. A1 and A11. Brief story on the work of engineer-theologians who use science and technology to solve problems of Halachic observance.

Gregorios, Paulos. "Science and Faith," *Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 1 (January 1985), pp. 140-151. Discussions of absolute causality and the existence of a world independent from our consciousness. The author argues that there "will have to be some repentance expressed on behalf of science, in relation to some of its arrogant exclusivism and tall claims in the past" (p. 149).

Hollinger, Dennis. "Can Bioethics Be Evangelical?" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1989), pp. 161-179. Yes, but only if it modifies "its past biblicalism and ethical rigorism" (p. 177). (Article should be subtitled: How to use bioethics to preach the good news of science and technology to evangelicals.)

Link, Christian. "La Crise écologique et l'éthique théologique," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 61, no. 2 (April-June 1981), pp. 147-160. Translated from German by Elisabeth Geiger. Condensed English version: "Ecological Ethics and Christian Ethics," *Theology Digest* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 149-153. Relying on the insights of others, Link argues that Christians must see themselves as part of the problem.

Lyon, David. "Modes of Production and Information: Does Computer Technology Challenge Marxist Analysis?" *Christian Scholar's Review* 18, no. 3 (March 1989), pp. 238-245. Modes of information have replaced modes of production as the central medium of domination today. Illustrates this historical shift with Foucault's concept of "panoptic surveillance." Foucault's thought is a crucial challenge to Christian social analysis in the 1990s.

Morris, Colin. "Love at a Distance The Spiritual Challenge of Religious Broadcasting," *Media Development* 33, no. 4 (1986), pp. 40-41. "The act of broadcasting, however well-intentional and sincerely executed, tears apart the unity of word and action personified in and by Jesus" (p. 40).

"New Technology and Pastoral Challenges." *New Theology Review* 2, no. 4 (November 1989), pp. 3-74. Contents: Robert J. Schreiter CPPS's "Editorial New Technology and Pastoral Challenges" (pp. 3-4), Paul Lakeland's "Technology and Critical Theory: The Case of Technology" (pp. 5-19), Richard A. McCormick SJ's "Technology and Morality: The Example of Medicine" (pp. 20-34), Regis A. Duffy OFM's "Only the Dance? Ritual in A Technologized World" (pp. 35-47), Robert P. Waznak SS's "Preaching the Gospel in an Age of Technology" (pp. 48-60), David F.

O'Connor ST's "Discretion and Capacity for Marriage: Some Canonical and Pastoral Reflections" (pp. 61-74), Joel Rippinger OSB's "Local Theologies in a World Church: The Indigena as Anawim" (pp. 75-78), Roland J. Faley TOR's "Signs of the Times: Capturing Moonbeams, Holding the Vision" (pp. 79-86), Joseph V. Kiernan OFM's "On My Mind: Reconciliation The Sacrament in Search of a Constituency" (pp. 87-88).

Noore, Susan. "Religious Television Destroys the Sacred," *Media Development* 34, no. 2 (1987), pp. 31-33. "The decision to decline active involvement with the electronic media" can be an exercise of responsibility for the church.

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Reichenbach, Bruce R. "C.S. Lewis on the Desolation of Devalued Science," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11, no. 2 (December 1982), pp. 99-111. Examination of Lewis' philosophical objections to naturalism in *Miracles* (1947) and his fictional critique of science in *That Hideous Strength* (1946). Lewis' primary concern is the temptation of science to "reach beyond the experimental to provide a metaphysical account of the universe" (p. 104).

Rolston, Holmes III. *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey*. New York: Random House, 1987. Pp. x, 358. First-rate textbook alternative to Ian Barbour's *Issues in Science and Religion* (1966). Rolston's survey of the dialogue between religion and science contains a sustained criticism of the process theology assimilation of God to the natural world. Reviewed by S. Mark Heim in *Christian Scholar's Review* 17, no. 4 (June 1988), pp. 490-491.

Russell, Robert John, William R. Stoeger SJ, and George V. Coyne SJ, eds. *John Paul II on Science and Religion: Reflections on the New View from Rome*. Vatican City and Notre Dame, IN: Vatican Observatory Publications and University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. Pp. xxvi, 122. John Paul II's message to a Vatican conference on the 300th anniversary of Newton's *Principia*, and commentaries by 19 scholars, only a few of whom address the issue of technology (see, e.g., the contributions by John B. Cobb Jr., Lindon Eaves, George F. R. Ellis, Elizabeth A. Johnson, Carl Mitcham, Tullio Regge, and Rosemary Radford Reutner).

"Science and Religion." *Anglican Theological Review* 63, no. 4 (October 1981), pp. 367-513. Special issue, guest edited by Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, containing Huston Smith's "Science and Theology: The Unstable Détente," William G. Pollard's "Science and Transcendence," David J. Rose's "Energy and Attitudes," E. Mansell Pattison's "The Behavioral Sciences in a Christian Perspective," James A. Hall's "Psychiatry and Religion: A Review and a Projection of Future Needs," Edward L. Alpen's "The Biotechnology Race," Richard K. Toner's "Thermodynamics and Theology," David A. Ames' "Science and Religion: Toward Understanding and Collaborating in the University Setting," Philip Morrison's "Warfare Today: Limits to Growth," Allan M Parrent's "Review Article: Faith, Science and the Future: What Happens When Science and Religion Actually Meet," and "A Selected Bibliography of Books in English Concerning Science and Religion" by David K. Himrod and Richard S.

Brooks. The bibliography contains a section on "Technology and Religious Values."

Smith, David H. "Bioethics: Recent Literature," *Anglican Theological Review* 64, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 85-89. Brief review highlighting Joseph Fletcher, Tom Beauchamp, Stanley Hauervas, Richard McCormick, and Paul Ramsey.

Soukup, Paul A. "Interweaving Theology and Communication," *Media Development* 32, no. 1 (1985), pp. 30-33. To analyze the relations between communication and theology it is necessary to distinguish fundamental, systematic, and pastoral theology in relation to various aspects of church, culture, and communication.

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. *Advent for Capitalists: Grief, Joy, and Gender in Contemporary Society*. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada: Champion College, University of Regina, 1988. Pp. 26. Pamphlet publication of a lecture from 1987.

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. "Liturgy in a Technological Age," in Peter E. Fink SJ, ed., *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 762-768. Pre-Vatican II balance of universal Latin liturgies and popular devotions based in local communities has been broken. Technological transportation and communication undermines local community, consumerist advertizing weakens universal symbols. Considers how the church might "retrieve the basis for a community rooted in sacred symbols in a culture whose technological infrastructure fragments community even as its best funded form of public discourse, advertising, demeans the symbols themselves" (p. 766). Cults and TV entertainments are false responses to real needs. Hope for more authentic responses can be found in reviving Catholic traditions of theater, spiritual direction, and narrative theology.

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. "Restoring the Lost Art: Storytelling, Electronic Media and Fragmented Public Discourse," *The Way* 28, no. 4 (October 1988), pp. 313-322. "The vitality and depth of our public and personal lives requires [narrative. But] nearly two centuries of western history have led to an electronic style of public discourse that fragments the ancient bonds of speaker and hearer. . ." (p. 320).

"Technology and Religion." *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 9 (1990). Pp. xv, 376. Theme section contents: William B. Jones and A. Warren Matthews' "Toward a Taxonomy of Technology and Religion" (pp. 3-23), A. Arnold Wettstein's "Ultimate Weapons in a Penultimate Age: A Theological Assessment of SDI Technology" (pp. 25-41), David Novak's "Technology and Its Ultimate Threat: A Jewish Meditation" (pp. 43-70), Waldo Beach's "The Impact of the Electronic Media on American Religion" (pp. 71-79), Robert C. Good's "Religion and Technology: A Look at Television Evangelists and Viewers" (pp. 81-91), J. Mark Thomas' "Are Science and Technology Quasi-Religions?" (pp. 93-102), Frank R. Harrison's "The Judeo-Christian Tradition and Crises in Contemporary Religion" (pp. 103-118), Larry Rasmussen's "Mindset and Moral Vision" (pp. 119-128), Charles Mabee's "The Fragility of Time: Orwell and Ellul in the Matrix of Theological Origins" (129-148), Darrell J. Fasching's "The Dialectic of Apocalypse and Utopia in the Theological Ethics of Jacques Ellul" (pp. 149-165), Gabriel Vahanian's "Artificial Intelligence and Western Culture: A Christian Approach" (pp. 167-183), Robert Cummings Neville, "Technology and The Richness of the World" (pp. 185-204), David E. Schrader's "Technology: Our Contemporary Snake" (pp. 205-215) and Martin H. Krieger's "Temptations of Design: A Meditation on Practice" (pp.

217-230). Colloquium section contents: Jane Mary Trau's "Humanæ Vitæ and the Current Instruction on the Origins of Human Life" (pp. 233-242), John F. Post's "On Reenchanted the World" (pp. 243-279), Frederick Ferré's "Technology, Nature, and Miracle" (pp. 281-286), John F. Post's "A Reply to Ferré, and a Comment on Trau" (pp. 287-290), Jane Mary Trau's "God-Talk, Physicalism, and Technology: A Mutual Endeavor" (pp. 291-295), Michael J. Carella's "The Myths of Thomas Szasz" (pp. 299-313), and Albert Borgmann's "Communities of Celebration: Technology and Public Life" (pp. 315-345). Review section contents: Reviews of C. Mitcham and J. Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (1984) by Friedrich Rapp, David A. Hoekema, and James F. Salmon, with a response by Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote; of F. Ferré, *Philosophy of Technology* (1988) by Thomas Rogers, Charles Dyke, and Steven Lee with a reply by Ferré; and of A.L. and R.P. Hiskes, *Science, Technology, and Policy Decisions* (1986) by David C. Snyder.

Verhey, Allen. "The Morality of Genetic Engineering," *Christian Scholar's Review* 14, no. 2 (December 1985), pp. 124-139. Critique of utilitarian theories applied to genetic engineering (e.g. Joseph Fletcher) in favor of a more traditional approach (e.g. C.S. Lewis). "The biological revolution requires wise people, not just clever people" (p. 124).

Waters, Brent, and Verlyn L. Barber, eds. *Science, Technology and the Christian Faith: An Account of Some Pilgrims in Search of Progress*. Charlotte, NC: United Ministries in Higher Education, 1991. Pp. vii, 145. Final Report of a United Ministries in Education/United Ministries in Higher Education Exploratory Committee on Science, Technology and the Christian Faith (1983-1990). Part One is the Report (pp. 3-39). Part Two, "The Redlands consultation Papers: 1985," includes Rustum Roy's "STS: A New Opportunity for the Re-Integration of Christian Concern into American Academic Life" (pp. 43-53), James B. Miller's "Foundations and Challenges" (pp. 54-63), Ronald Cole-Turner's "Theological Engagement with Science and Technology" (pp. 64-68), Brent Waters' "An Ethical Framework for Campus Ministry in a Scientific and Technological Age" (pp. 69-76), Scott I. Paradise's "A Ministry to Scientists and Engineers" (pp. 77-84). Part Three, "The Duke Consultation Papers: 1987," includes Edith Sylla's "The Modern Problem" (pp. 87-90), Patrick H. McDonald's "Two Hands, Two Feet, One Hand, One Heart" (pp. 91-101). Part Four, "The Jacksonville Beach Consultation Papers: 1989," includes Ansley Coe Throckmorton's "Bible Study: Psalm 24" (pp. 105-108), Langdon Gilkey's "The Influence of Science on Theology" (pp. 109-116), Roger L. Shinn's "Technology, Theology and Human Decisions" (pp. 117-125), Verlyn L. Barker's "Science, Technology and the Church" (pp. 126-131), Ansley Coe Throckmorton's "Bible Study: Mark 6:30" (pp. 132-135). Part Five contains three documentation appendices on participants and chronology.

Wilkinson, Loren E. "A Christian Ecology of Death: Biblical Imagery and 'The Ecological Crisis,'" *Christian Scholar's Review* 5, no. 4 (June 1976), pp. 319-338. Struggles with the relationship between theodicy and the bloody exchange of death for life inherent in the ecology of the food chain. Even in Eden, life is sustained only at the expense of other life. Vegetarianism does not alter this inescapable fact. Wilkinson concludes: "It may not be that the Fall brought death into the world, but that at the Fall, death became an enemy" (p. 324). Death may not be totally the result of sin. Develops a theology of substitution relating the Eucharist meal of Christ

to the principle of exchange inherent in the food chain. Quotes Bertholt Brecht: "The slogan of Heaven: Eat *and* be eaten" (p. 334).

Wilkinson, Loren. "Cosmic Christology and the Christian's Role in Creation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11, no. 1 (September 1981), pp. 18-40. The Christian church has largely failed to develop fully the implications of Christ's Incarnation for an understanding of the divine immanence.

Wybrow, Cameron. "The Old Testament and the Conquest of Nature: A Fresh Examination," *Epworth Review* 17, no. 1 (January 1990), pp. 77-88. Makes three arguments against the view that Christianity is a cause of the modern technological mastery of nature: "(1) 'Nature' in the Old Testament, though not sacred or divine, is not therefore inanimate or merely a shock of resources; (2) The Genesis account of dominion does not give man the entire world, but only a part of it, and only a partial control over that; (3) The technological enterprise, insofar as it goes beyond the acquisition of ordinary arts and crafts, is viewed by the Old Testament with suspicion" (p. 80).

## About The Ellul Studies Forum

### Background

*The Ellul Studies Forum* was first published in August of 1988. Two issues are produced each year (in January and July). The goal of the *Forum* is to honor the work of Jacques Ellul both by analyzing and applying his thought to aspects of our technological civilization and by carrying forward his concerns in new directions.

What the *Forum* is not intended to be is a vehicle for *true disciples* or *Ellul groupies*. The whole thrust of Ellul's work has been to encourage others to think for themselves and invent their own responses to the challenges of a technological civilization. Although we do review and discuss Ellul's work, it is not our intention to turn his writings into a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work will be to carry forward its spirit and its agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization.

Ellul invites us to think new thoughts and enact new deeds. To that end we invite you to submit essays on appropriate topics. If you have suggestions for themes that you would like to see addressed in future issues, they are also welcome.

### Manuscript Submissions

Original manuscripts or manuscripts responding to essays in previous issues should be sent to Darrell J. Fasching, Editor, *The Ellul Studies Forum*, Department of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa FL 33620. Hard copy and DOS diskette should be sent together, indicating software and version number. (Diskettes will be returned.) Endnotes should be typed as text to facilitate laser typesetting. Length may vary from five to fifteen double spaced pages. Suggestions of themes for future issues are also welcome.

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If you would be willing to be a reviewer of books for the *Forum*, send your *vita* and a list of the areas/issues you would be interested in reviewing to our Book Review Editor:

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